YOICK-KS AWAY!

Taking a Fence, Monmouth County Hunt

Exhilarating Sport of Fox Hunting as Now Practised in America Is Rapidly Becoming a "Poor Man's" Sport—We Are a Nation of Natural Riders

TWENTY years ago three men of importance in the business world were together in the smoking room of a transatlantic steamship. Two of them were listening sympathetically while a third was telling about a son.

"He'll never amount to anything, but it isn't his fault entirely. I sent him to the wrong school, to begin with. When he was twelve he learned to smoke cigarettes. Now he is 'going in,' as he says, for fox hunting, and I've given up hope altogether."

Three weeks ago a party of young Englishmen were in a steamship smoking room on their way home after a winter spent in California and Virginia. One of them, Lord Herbert, was holding forth to an American friend.

"We hadn't an idea that we'd get any sort of hunting or polo in the States, but I was amazed. I never saw better polo than that played all over California, and I am coming back to Virginia some time to hunt there again. One chap I played against in a polo match in California was marvellous. Yet he's poor in a way, owns only two ponies, and didn't take up the game until two years ago. I couldn't understand at all until I complimented him on his form, and then he explained that he'd been riding all sorts of horses all his life. You have an army of natural riders in your country. We have no such class at home, unfortunately."

An army of natural riders. A full and complete explanation of why the ancient and exhilarating sport of fox hunting—"the spirit of war without its guilt and but five and twenty per cent of its danger," to quote the immortal Mr. Jorrocks—has found a firm place in American country life and is gathering recruits by the hour.

Twenty years ago in this country—when the national prejudice against cigarettes was perfervid—fox hunting had a fixed place in the card index of popular imagination. One heard it discussed with scorn as an alleged sport indulged in by young men who rode to "dogs" not because they liked it but because they felt they were being exclusive. They were pictured as having narrow shoulders and wearing No. 6 hats. It was understood, of course, that irate farmers shot pepper and salt after them as their chargers trampled down crops and that they took joy in the slaughter of an intelligent animal that had never harmed any of them, provided always that they pursue a fox at all. Mostly in the early "hunting," one was informed, they chased an anise seed bag, a performance which to the national mind so travestied fox hunting as to rob even that execrated pastime of its last excuse. In the funny papers they were pictured invariably as falling off their horses and running away from the fox.

"Poor Man's" Sport.

It was impressed on the unprivileged above all other considerations that fox hunting was in the first and last place utterly undemocratic and ruinously expensive always.

There are now a score of well organized hunts and scores more of less well organized ones in half the States of the Union.

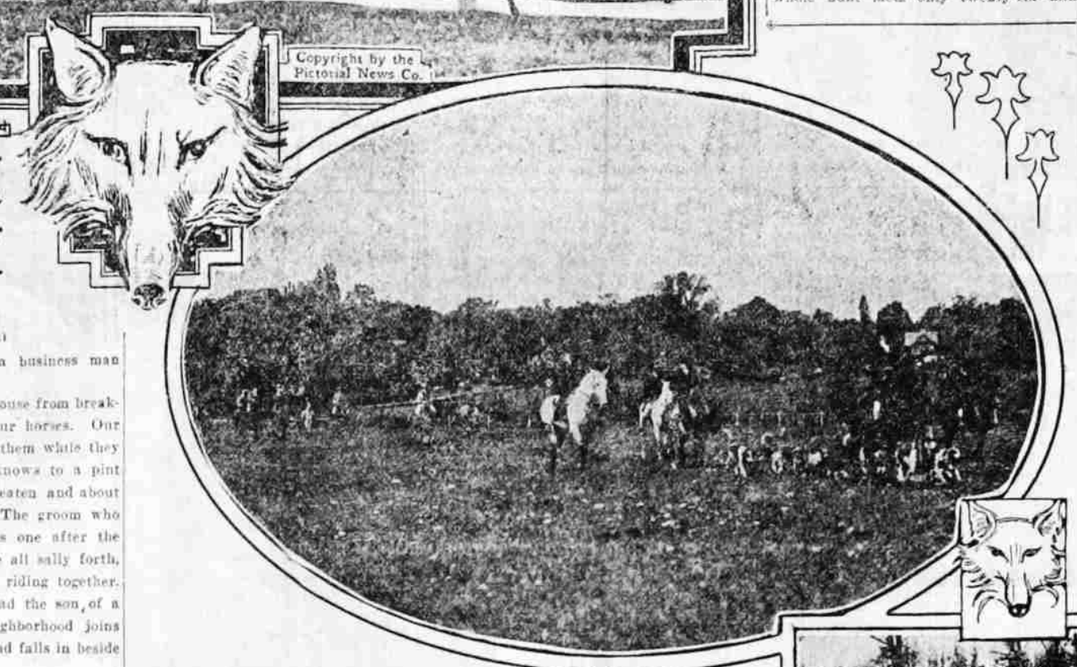
Like the "turkey trot," everybody's doing it. Let us assume ourselves as getting out of bed betimes in the house of any friend at any place thirty miles or so from any large American city with a view of attending the nearest meet.

The time of year is autumn, when there are no crops showing above ground. The fiction that the fox hunter is the natural enemy of the growing crop perishes right here. Usually he is an owner of farm land himself. More than frequently he is personally a farmer. He is also, about eight times out of ten, a business man in the nearby city, but when hunting interferes with his business he lays aside his business—to return to it refreshed.

As we come out of the house from breakfast a groom leads up our horses. Our host has been out to see them while they were breakfasting and knows to a pint just how much they have eaten and about how "ready" they are. The groom who has led them out mounts one after the rest of us are up and we all sally forth, our host and his servant riding together. A half mile down the road the son of a small farmer of the neighborhood joins us at the end of a lane and falls in beside our host and his man.

Here the fiction of fox hunting as a sport undemocratic perishes like the fiction of the spoiled crops.

"Still riding that half bred whale?" observes the young farmer, taking a comprehensive survey of the animal our host is riding. "I can't see them. It would be different if you were a fat man, but you're a human slate pencil. Why don't you stick to the clean breds?"



The M. F. H. and Hounds Lead the Way to the "Take Off," Berkshire Hunt, Lenox, Mass.
Photo by Pictorial News Co.

The speaker is himself astride a strapping thoroughbred with shoulders like a toboggan slide and a pair of quarters that look as though they could catapult the rest of the horse over a church steeple if necessary. His colt is "rising four" and looks "a little bit above himself" and then some. A chicken crosses the road and the colt delights his owner with an exhibition of fancy dancing that would pitch less of a horseman into the next field.

"A little short of work," announced the young centaur, "but me for the clean breds every time. He may run over hounds when we get away, but he'll never lie down under a tree and go to sleep. Why don't you ride one yourself, as I asked already?"

Yoick—ks Away!

Our host owns the young farmer's father's farm, but he replies quite humbly.

"I'm a married man, Dick, and I like a little of the cold strain under me. The fences in this part of the world look higher than they used to, and sometimes I like to sneak around one."

"I hold with Dick," chimes in the groom, "for a long day and a 'ard day there's naught like the clear racing blood. I always likes to see a gen'leman mounted proper, and the over the left son of a cart 'orse is out o' 'is company in the 'unting field."

A turn in the road and before us a cross roads with perhaps forty riders, a third of them women, gathered picturesquely.

Suddenly the ears of every horse in the company go up alertly and Farmer Dick's chestnut colt rears like a kangaroo and then whirls like a dervish.

A young woman who has come with us to look on only, and who rides a safe and sleepy old pony, cries out in delight, "Oh, there come the dogs!"

Tom, the groom, drops back beside her. It is his office to take her bridle rein if by any chance the venerable pony should remember his youth, but as he sidles close he whispers in her ear confidentially:—"Say 'ounds, miss. Dogs is dogs, but fox-'ounds is 'ounds first and last."

The "'ounds," trotting down the road, faces and "tails," as our young woman observes, very active.

Tom, the groom, whispers to her again:—

"Say 'sterns,' miss. Fox'ounds 'asn't tails the same as dey isn't dogs."

Meantime there has been the blast of a horn and the hounds have deployed into a nearby wood with their noses to the ground. Everybody keeps away. The whips have dismounted, and a groom holds the horse of each. The pads of the hounds patter lightly in the carpet of dead leaves in the little wood, and Tom remarks:—

"They'll jump 'im in about a minute, miss. Keep your pony's 'ead in your lap, for you can't never tell, ma'am, 'ow the oldest 'orse'll be'ave when it's 'gone away.' 'Ear that music now? That'll be Maud or Friday, both o' them wicked 'untin' 'ounds. Ain't that 'eavenly melody?"

"I hope we'll get a view to-day," says the elder woman. "It is four years now since I've actually seen a fox and I'm beginning to forget what one looks like."

"That's the devil of fox hunting in this country," replies a man. "This is the first time you've hunted this part of the country, you say"—they have never been introduced. "Well, don't set your hopes too high. Two foxes in twelve years is our proud record, but who knows but to-day may add a third."

As he pockets his flask he indulges in dissertations on the superiority after all of a country so timbered and thick with underbrush that there is practically never a kill. "After all," he says, "who wants to kill a fox anyway? The riding is all anybody wants."

Let us pause here to ponder what he has said. It is true that in America a fox killed by fox hunters is a rare fox indeed. Even in Virginia, where the sport is pursued more enthusiastically perhaps, than in any other part of the world, a dead fox is the exceptional fox. Our country has not yet been moulded to the parklike smoothness of England and most fox hunters will weep when it has.

As it is now the country affords hazards for fox hunting that more than make up for the deficiency in slaughter, and it is of a quality to bring out all the courage and resourcefulness that a sportsman has.

Yet a decade ago the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was invoked in the cases of half the American hunt clubs then in existence. Legislators who had never seen a hunt passed solemn statutes forbidding the pursuit of a fox on horseback, and the hunt clubs affected either disbanded or turned wholly to drag hunting. The late Peter F. Collier was one victim of the humane crusade.

The Drag "Hunt."

Mr. Collier was at that time at the head of the Monmouth County Hunt, in New Jersey, and kept among other cattle an Irish stag, which dwelt inside the four walls of a high board enclosure and lived luxuriously in the matter of food and exercise. Its exercise was had two days a week, when it was hunted. On these occasions it was given a mile start before the buckhounds were loosed on its trail. Every time it was sent away the stag ran for ten miles or so, took a roundabout route home and ultimately leaped the high fence surrounding its habitation and went back to its lettuce in comfort. The hounds were helpless before the fence of course, as Mr. Collier intended that they should be. "But there's more of a thrill in it than drag hunting," he used to say, "and it carries a lot of style beside." However, he was caught up short by the law and presented his stag to a zoological park.

In the same relation drag hunting—the sport, if you remember, which, according to another hoary fiction, was not a sport at all. It is not, if you insist that sport must be sanguinary. But drag hunting is no sport for the timid, and whoever disbelieves should crank up his automobile and go out on Long Island some day this spring and see one.

A drag hunt ordinarily is laid over the stiffest kind of country, with the fencing something to make the heart quaver and the pace "too good to inquire." None but the "best men" indulge in it at all. The hounds run to a scent so strong, incidentially, as to unfit them for fox hunting ever after, and travel like the wind.

Only the pick of the huntsmen and women and the pick of the horses are up at the finish. About half the field as a rule drops out at the first check. The whole hunt lasts only twenty-six minutes, and six of these minutes are spent at check at the end of the first ten minutes.

The automobile has made it possible for this sport to be enjoyed vicariously by those who love their comfort and value their necks, for most drag hunts are now run in fields just inside broad highways, so that a "gallery" of many motor cars may attend from start to finish.

But let us return to our original hunting field, for the hounds are away again. Tom, the groom; Dick, the farmer, and the woman who hopes to see a fox and her daughter are "up front" and the rest of us trailing. The pace is milder now, for fox, hounds and horses are weary.

Suddenly the woman who wants to see a fox pitches on her horse's neck and recovers as he refuses a fence. One of us, very gallantly now, pulls up and lowers a rail for her and we all crow hop through.

The three red coats, Tom, Dick and the young girl, are two fields in advance now. Suddenly, for they are up wind from us, comes the rapturous "Haloo-oo-oo!" that tells us the hounds have broken from scent to view and our pulses and our horses' pulses leap at the sound.

To the unaccustomed ear the "music" of foxhounds on the scent suggests the torment of souls in a place accounted the diametrical opposite of heaven. As the time honored phrase has it, the "melody" baffles description. One who does not know imagines each and every hound being deprived of its hound life by slow torture, for their wailing is of the most heartrending variety imaginable, the very apotheosis of mournful and tragic lamentation.

There is a flash of red coats as the master and whips spring to their saddles, and another flash of white and black and tan as the hounds, with their bodies close to the earth, swarm across the road and into the next field.

"Gone away!" cry twenty voices. Even the girl on the old pony has her hands full now. Every horse in the company is scrambling for the first fence, ten riders clear it at a bound, twenty more get away after a refusal or two, and one young woman crashes to the ground as her heavily built hunter shores through a panel of fence, taking the solid rails with him like matchwood. Singularly, no one goes to the fallen girl's assistance. She picks herself up, limps after her sluggish horse, which already is cropping the grass afield beyond, and she is observed to be weeping bitterly as she comes leading him back. The tears, however, are the tears not of pain, but of vexation.

"Best Men" at the Check.

"My fault," she cries. "I shouldn't have brought him out after hunting him only yesterday. He gives the sweetest ride in the world when he's hunted twice a week, but one day more than that and he's the sulkiest thing alive.

Pause here and consider yourself peering into the grave of another hoary fiction expressed some time back as that in which fox hunting was considered meet sport for those with narrow shoulders and with No. 6 heads. The girl who has just been down will have plenty of company to-day.

In that imperishable classic dealing with the life and adventures of Mr. Jorrocks there is related the coincident of an English hunting field.

One horseman addresses another as they ride side by side with the hounds running to a breast high scent and the country flying past them like so much moving picture film.

"Lord Scattercash fell under his horse at a bullfinch a while back."

"Was he killed?"

"I don't know—the pace was too rattling to inquire."

Be it explained, however, that the men who rode on when the girl was thrown through a fence were not deficient in chivalry. They were quite well aware not only that the young person could take care of herself, but that she would have resented their misbehavior in tendering their help more than she resented the misbehavior of her hunter.

Assume now that the hunt has led its riders over from six to ten fields and that Mons. Reynard has distanced the pack and sunk his trail in a brook. The pace has killed off the inexpert and the faint hearted, and only the "best men" are up at the check. Among the "best men" is a woman, perhaps forty years old, and her daughter, a girl of eighteen. They slip to the ground and readjust their saddle girths as the master and servants, once again on foot, manoeuvre the hounds about the edges of a creek. A man proffers a flask and both women "take an observation of the sun."

"I must see him, I must," cries the woman almost with a sob, and with one accord we swing wide to get the benefit of a panel of fence where the two top rails are down. The woman who must see a fox is first through, but when we reach the top of the rising ground before us we see nothing. And then all at once the wood have a mile away becomes vocal with a babel of hound music and we hear the shouts of the huntsmen and the cracking of their cutting whips. We advance at a trot and come ultimately single file through the close wood to a clearing. The hounds are quiet now, but standing to one side of them appears the young girl who rode straighter than Dick or Tom. She has the fox brush and one of the Whips is advancing toward her mother with the pate. Tom and Dick will each get a pad and so will those two of us who were next up.

And then the girl's mother gives way to a torrent of tears.

"I never saw him at all, I never saw him for a moment," she cries. "Oh, why was I ever born."

And now for the death of the oldest and most treasured fiction of all the fictions—the pink tea.

Every one knows, of course, that the red coat of the hunting field is called a pink coat always. Very well.

"Well we've killed haven't we?" says Dick the young farmer, "suppose we go over to mother's, a piece down the road and have her draw us a dish of tea."

The Pink Tea.

And so we all go, M. F. H. and his servants in pink, the rest of us in tweed or khaki and all of us dirty and bedraggled. We arrive at Dick's mother's, dispose ourselves in her kitchen and she fetches out thick slices of bread, a pie and an earthen teapot full of tea.

"When Dick first allowed he'd go fox chasin'," she informs us, "I was minded to take the cat o' nine tails to him. But that was ten years ago, and if I wasn't so old I'd go out with 'em myself now."

And she would be quite as welcome as Dick is, for she probably rides almost as well, having joined the "army of natural riders" shortly after she left her cradle. At all events, she is hostess at a pink tea; for the pink tea is perhaps the oldest tradition of hunting and is the most informal party in the world. Whoever lives nearest the spot where the fox is killed or the spot where the master takes off his hounds is its logical and inevitable host. It is a pity to have to destroy a still living theory to the effect that a pink tea is a gathering of feeble minded pedestrians who want to be very fashionable, but facts are facts.

A last word concerning the pink coat. Except at drag hunts, which are occasions of formality, it is rarely worn in this country except by the master and servants. It, however, is on its way into general favor and in a few years no doubt will be as generally seen in the hunting field here as abroad. A favorite story among hunting men on Long Island is told of Judge John Graham, of Jericho.

He went abroad a few years ago and came home with a beautiful pink coat in his trunk. A few days after his return he was host at a pink tea. Among his guests was an Englishman. Judge Graham was showing the Englishman through his house when his guest espied the pink garment in a wardrobe.

"But look here, you," he said, "what have you got it for? They wouldn't let me wear mine this morning, you know."

"I only wear it for one thing," explained the Judge. "When I want to stick a note in the bank I put it on and ride over there and they haven't the courage to refuse me the money."

Three days later, when the Englishman suddenly comprehended, he nearly fell off his horse.

Meadowbrook
Photo by Pictorial News Co.

Riders Leaving for the Essex Hunt
Photo by Pictorial News Co.

H. L. Herbert Taking a Picket Fence, Richmond County Hunt
Photo Copyright by Pictorial News Co.

America's Gift to the World.

IT is not an exaggeration to say that nothing has contributed more to the development of the American people than "Indian corn." Without it the native peoples of America could hardly have developed beyond the savage state, and the explorers from Europe would certainly have been unable to effect a permanent settlement upon the American Continent.

Maize was the only health sustaining food the Indians could supply to the early New Englanders; it sustained the adventurers who traversed the valleys of the James, of the St. Johns and of the Mississippi; it provided the Spaniards with nourishment during the reckless march from Vera Cruz to the plateau of Mexico, and this same maize was found by Pizarro's small army of conquerors when they subjugated the innumerable hosts of the Incas of Peru.

Yet up to the time of the landing of Columbus in America maize was absolutely unknown to the inhabitants of the Old World. The few kernels of the new food brought to Queen Isabella by Columbus were classed as grain.

Indian corn is really maize; in English speaking countries outside of the United States it is called maize, and in all Spanish countries "maise" is the word employed. Maize is altogether an American word, coming directly from the primitive Arawak, the most widely disseminated Indian stock in South America.

From America maize was first introduced into Spain. Thence it spread throughout Europe and into Asia and Africa. It reached India and Burmah early, and it grows there now everywhere among the hills and is the favorite crop of the people. The Portuguese reached Java in 1496 and China in 1516, taking maize with them. To-day its geographical distribution is worldwide and as a food crop has few equals among the cereals. The Indians thrived on it, and so long as they continue its use they show much of their pristine sturdiness, and when it is denied them they suffer in physique and morale.

Maize has also played an important part in the social life of America. With the aborigines it was an important element in their general nature worship. The Aztecs consecrated a goddess to it, and the Mayas, the Peruvians and others observed the ripening of the grain with both solemnity and gladness. Even in burial rites corn was not omitted. In many instances it was interred with the body to serve as food on the journey into the unknown world, and the tombs of all countries, from Ohio in North America to Peru in South America, contain evidences of the custom of putting maize in the burial place with the body.